Catalogue of American Amphibians and Reptiles.

Powell, R. and R.W. Henderson. 1998. *Alsophis melanichnus*.

Alsophis melanichnus Cope

Alsophis melanichnus: Cope 1862:76. Type locality, "Hayti, near Jeremie [Dépt. Grand'Anse]." Holotype, unlocated, presumably lost, an adult (total length "36 in.," tail "10 in. 3 lin."), collected by Dr. Weinland (not examined by authors).
Leimadophis antillensis sancticrucis: Amaral 1929 (1930):164 (not of Cope 1862).

• **Content.** No subspecies are recognized.

• **Definition.** This moderately sized (SVL "about 630 mm;" Schwartz and Henderson, 1991) colubrid has "about" 189 ventrals and "about" 108 subcaudals (male), 17 dorsal scale rows at midbody, 8 or 9 supralabials, 10 infralabials, 1/1 preoculars, 2/2 postoculars, 2+2/2+2 temporals, and 1/1 loreals. The cloacal scute (= anal plate) is divided.

Dorsal ground color in preserved specimens is dark olive. A pale lateral stripe on the neck continues on adjoining margins of scale rows 4 and 5 to midbody. A distinct black line between scale rows 5 and 6 similarly disappears at midbody. The labials are somewhat paler and some white blotches occur on the chin. The venter is somewhat paler than the dorsum and most ventrals are edged with a narrow, pale border.

• **Diagnosis.** *Alsophis melanichnus* can be distinguished from all other Hispaniolan colubrids by having 17 dorsal scale rows at midbody and/or a body that is not disproportionately slender. The only sympatric congener, *A. anomalus*, has 21 dorsal scale rows at midbody. All other Hispaniolan colubrids either have extremely slender bodies and 13 or fewer posterior dorsal scale rows (*Uromacer*) or have 19 dorsal scale rows at midbody (*Antillophis*, *Darlingtonia*, *Hypsirhynchus*, *Ialtris*).

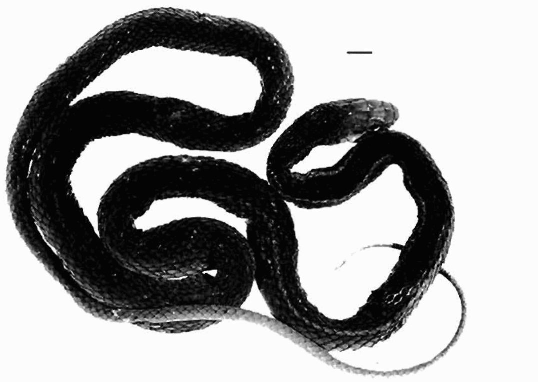


Figure 1. Adult male *Alsophis melanichnus* (MCZ R-7836) from La Vega (= La Vega Province?), Dominican Republic. Scale = 1 cm.

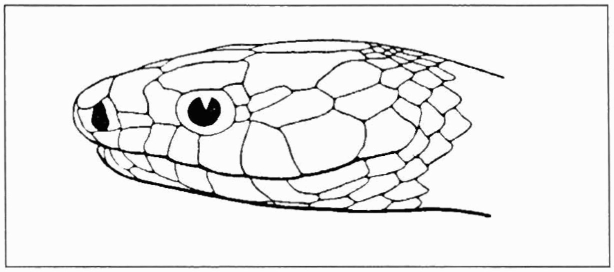
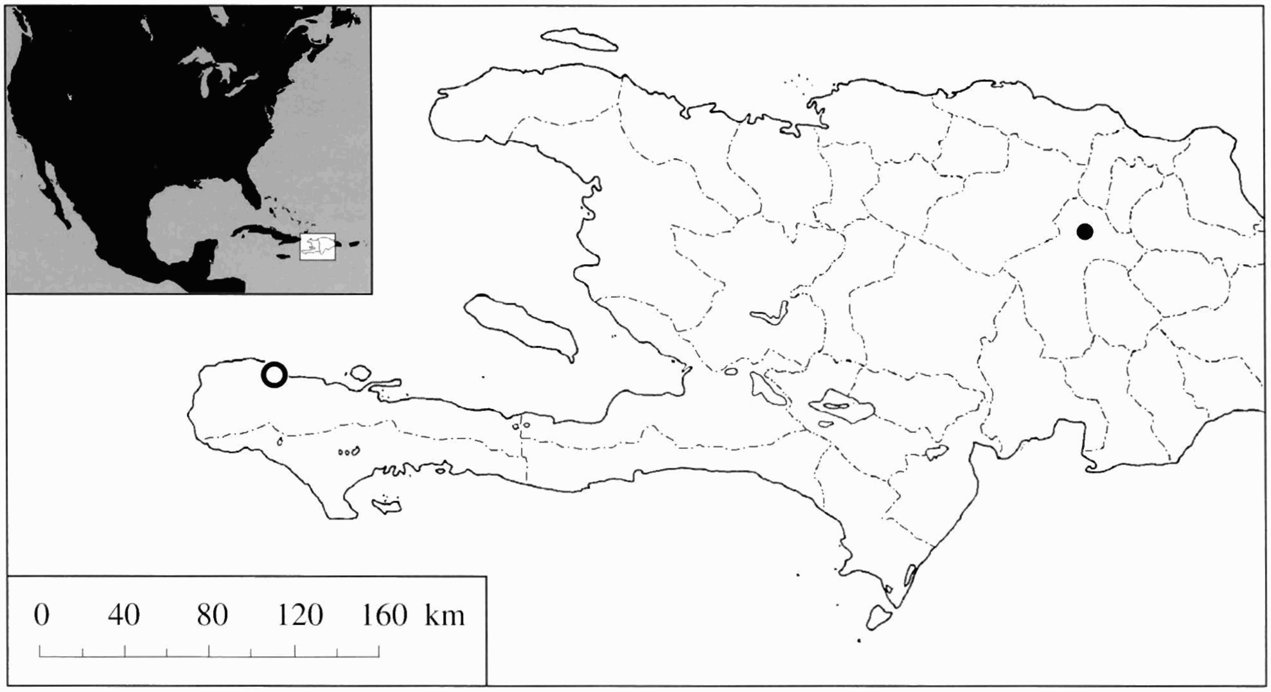


Figure 2. Head of an adult male *Alsophis melanichnus* (MCZ R-7836) from La Vega (= La Vega Province?), Dominican Republic (from Cochran 1941).

• **Descriptions.** In addition to that of Cope (1862), descriptions are in Cochran (1941) and Schwartz and Henderson (1991).

• **Illustrations.** Line drawings of the head are in Cochran (1941).



Map. Distribution of *Alsophis melanichnus* (modified from Schwartz and Henderson 1991). The type locality is marked with a circle, a dot denotes the other known locality.

• Distribution. This Hispaniolan endemic is known only from the type locality and one additional site in La Vega Province, República Dominicana. The range has been illustrated in Schwartz and Henderson (1991).

• Fossil Record. None.

• Pertinent Literature. Schwartz (1966) referred to *A. melanichnus* in a discussion of confusion over the taxonomy of *A. sanctaecrucis*. Maglio (1970) discussed origin, phylogeny, and zoogeography based primarily on osteological characters. Schwartz (1980) characterized this species as an islandwide form. Schwartz and Henderson (1991) presented information on distribution and natural history. Rodríguez-Robles and Greene (1996) included this species in their study of ecological relationships of Greater Antillean snakes.

The species is included in additional notes, checklists, and guides by Boulenger (1894, part, under *Dromicus sanctaecrucis*), Barbour (1914, 1930, 1935, 1937), Schwartz and Thomas (1975), Henderson and Schwartz (1984), Henderson et al. (1984), Schwartz and Henderson (1985, 1988), Henderson and Crother (1989), Powell et al. (1996), and Henderson and Sajdak (1996).

• Remarks. That this species is extant seems very unlikely (Henderson and Sajdak 1986, Henderson 1992). It has not been collected since 1910, and herpetological collecting on Hispaniola has been geographically widespread and intense for more than 35 years. Considering the rarity of this species in collections, it was never very common, or at least not so in the past century.

Frank and Ramus (1995) proposed use of the common name "La Vega Racer." Because of its reference to one known locality, and not the type-locality at that, we prefer to avoid its use.

• Etymology. The name *melanichnus* is from the Greek *melanos* (= black) and *ichnos* (= mark), presumably in reference to the black spots on some specimens.

• Acknowledgments. We thank José Rosado (Museum of Comparative Zoology) for his assistance.

Literature Cited

Amaral, A. 1929 (1930). Estudos sobre ophidios neotropicos. XVIII. Lista remissiva dos ophidios da região neotropica. Mem. Inst. Butantan 4:129–271.
Barbour, T. 1914. A contribution to the zoögeography of the West Indies, with especial reference to amphibians and reptiles. Mem. Mus. Comp. Zoöl. 44:205–359.
—. 1930. A list of Antillean reptiles and amphibians. Zoologica (N.Y.) 11:61–116.
—. 1935. A second list of Antillean reptiles and amphibians. Zoologica (N.Y.) 19:77–141.
—. 1937. Third list of Antillean reptiles and amphibians. Bull. Mus. Comp. Zoöl. 82:77–166.
Boulenger, G.A. 1894. Catalogue of the Snakes in the British Museum (Natural History). Vol. 2. Trustees of the British Museum, London.
Cochran, D.M. 1941. The herpetology of Hispaniola. Bull. U.S. Natl. Mus. (177):vii + 398 p.
Cope, E.D. 1862. Synopsis of the species of *Holcosus* and *Ameiva*, with diagnoses of new West Indian and South Ameri can Colubridae. Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Philadelphia 14:60–82.
Frank, N. and E. Ramus. 1995. A Complete Guide to Scientific and Common Names of Reptiles and Amphibians of the World. NG Publ., Inc., Pottsville, Pennsylvania.
Henderson, R.W. 1992. Consequences of predator introductions and habitat destruction on amphibians and reptiles in the post-Columbus West Indies. Carib. J. Sci. 28:1–10.
— and B.I. Crother. 1989. Biogeographic patterns of predation in West Indian colubrid snakes, p. 479–517. *In* C.A. Woods (ed.), Biogeography of the West Indies: Past, Present, and Future. Sandhill Crane Press, Gainesville, Florida.
— and R.A. Sajdak. 1986. West Indian racers: a disappearing act or a second chance? Lore 36(3):13–18.
— and —. 1996. Diets of West Indian racers (Colubridae: *Alsophis*): composition and biogeographic implications, p. 327–338. *In* R. Powell and R.W. Henderson (eds.), Contributions to West Indian Herpetology: A Tribute to Albert Schwartz. SSAR Contrib. Herpetol. Vol. 12. Ithaca, New York.
— and A. Schwartz. 1984. A guide to the identification of the amphibians and reptiles of Hispaniola. Milwaukee Pub. Mus. Spec. Publ. Biol. Geol. (4):1–70.
—, —, and S.J. Incháustegui. 1984. Guía para la indentificación de los anfibios y reptiles de la Hispaniola. Mus. Nac. Hist. Nat. Ser. Mono. (1):1–128.
Maglio, V.J. 1970. West Indian xenodontine colubrid snakes: their probable origin, phylogeny, and zoogeography. Bull. Mus. Comp. Zool. 141:1–53.
Powell, R., R.W. Henderson, K. Adler, and H.A. Dundee. 1996. An annotated checklist of West Indian amphibians and reptiles, p. 51–93. *In* R. Powell and R.W. Henderson (eds.), Contributions to West Indian Herpetology: A Tribute to Albert Schwartz. SSAR, Ithaca, New York.
Rodríguez-Robles, J.A. and H.W. Greene. 1996. Ecological patterns in Greater Antillean macrostomatan snake assemblages, with comments on body-size evolution in *Epicrates* (Boidae), p. 339–357. *In* R. Powell and R.W. Henderson (eds.), Contributions to West Indian Herpetology: A Tribute to Albert Schwartz. SSAR, Ithaca, New York.
Schwartz, A. 1966. Snakes of the genus *Alsophis* in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Stud. Fauna Curaçao Carib. Isl. 23: 175–227.
—. 1980. The herpetogeography of Hispaniola, West Indies. Stud. Fauna Curaçao Carib. Isl. 61:86–127.
— and and R.W. Henderson. 1985. A Guide to the Identification of the Amphibians and Reptiles of the West Indies Exclusive of Hispaniola. Milwaukee Pub. Mus., Milwaukee, Wisconsin.
— and —. 1988. West Indian amphibians and reptiles: a checklist. Milwaukee Pub. Mus. Contr. Biol. Geol. (74):1–264.
— and —. 1991. Amphibians and Reptiles of the West Indies: Descriptions, Distributions, and Natural History. Univ. Florida Press, Gainesville.
— and R. Thomas. 1975. A check-list of West Indian amphibians and reptiles. Carnegie Mus. Nat. Hist. Spec. Publ. (1): 1–216.

Robert Powell, Department of Natural Sciences, Avila College, Kansas City, MO 64145, and **Robert W. Henderson**, Section of Vertebrate Zoology, Milwaukee Public Museum, Milwaukee, WI 53233.

Primary editor for this account, Larry David Wilson.